

ACTIVIST ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Art Catalogue

From show at Twymon Art Gallery,
August 17 – October 25, 2019

ARTIST STATEMENT

Social justice and assemblage art collide in the work of Dr. Wendy G Turner. The artist has a 20+ year career as a social work educator, but she has nurtured a lifelong passion for creative pursuits. In 2016, she began using her art to further her work in social justice activism and education. When confronting issues of social, economic, racial and environmental injustices, art can evoke emotions and raise consciousness in just seconds. It captures attention in ways that printed words cannot. It reaches different populations and exposes them to new paradigms. In keeping with her views on environmental issues, the artist prefers to repurpose existing materials in her artwork whenever possible. She uses assemblage or bricolage techniques to bring together disparate items in new ways, reflecting her fondness for Surrealist art. Having created shadow boxes since childhood, she frequently houses her assemblages in various boxes, reflecting the influence of artists such as Joseph Cornell and Betye Saar.

Wendy G. Turner

American Pitchfork Revolution
2019, Assemblage
12" x 24" x 7"



Economic Disparity

In 1789, over 7,000 women, frustrated by the starvation of the common people in France, grabbed pitchforks and marched from Paris to Versailles to demand change. These women effectively ended the monarchy of Versailles by joining forces to revolt.

In 1920, 50,000 starving peasants wielding pitchforks revolted against the Soviet Union in the Black Eagle Uprising.

In the US, the gap between the wealthy and the poor is widening exponentially. In a recent Ted Talk, billionaire Nick Hanauer warns his fellow "plutocrats" that this inequality will lead to another pitchfork revolution if they do not increase wages and economic prosperity among the withering middle class.

In this piece, the pitchfork is rising out of the pile of gold bars.

Lavender Scare
2019, Assemblage
14" x 9" x 3"



Homophobia

Shrouded in fears of Communism, in 1953 the US President Eisenhower enacted Executive Order 10450, which barred homosexuals from federal employment. This led to the mass firing of over 5,000 LGBTQ+ persons, including members of the military. This was dubbed the “Lavender Scare” as it was a branch of the “Red Scare” taking place at the time. Government officials feared that persons who were homosexual would be easily blackmailed by Communists and should not have access to top-secret government or military information, as they may become spies. This discrimination against LGBTQ+ persons overtly continued until 1995, when Eisenhower’s order was overturned by then President Bill Clinton. In 2009, then President Barack Obama issued a memorandum to government departments and agencies, offering further non-discrimination benefits to federal employees that are LGBTQ+.

The piece illustrates the United States and its policy literally dumping its “lavender” military members, while enveloped in the red box of communism.

The New Segregation
2019, Assemblage
13" x 39" x 13"



Flint Water Crisis

Flint, Michigan was once a prosperous town that centered on the American automotive industry. When General Motors began closing factories in Flint in the 1980s, the city faced rapid decline and “white flight.” By the 21st century, the city was \$30 million in debt. In 2014, to reduce costs, the city of Flint, began sourcing water from the Flint River following construction of a new pipeline. However, they failed to prevent corrosion that led to lead contamination in the water supply. The water was so toxic, that the GM automotive plant stopped using it in October of 2014; however, the state did not declare the water unsafe to drink for another year despite multiple experts warning them that the water contained dangerous levels of lead.

This water cooler is filled with pencils, rather than water. It is labeled to indicate that this is the “water” for those persons of color, harkening back to the time of segregated drinking fountains.

WWJD?
2019, Assemblage
10" x 18" x 4"



Family Separation

President Trump initiated a policy of separating children from parents at the US-Mexico border, in an effort to deter illegal immigration. The policy failed to include a plan for reuniting those children with their families. The thousands of children held in detention centers along the border are living without adequate food, bedding, soap, toothpaste, clean clothing or adult supervision. This seems antithetical to the Christian beliefs of some of Trumps most ardent supporters.

In this assemblage, the Jesus figurine is carrying a child, wrapped in the foil blanket that is common at the border detention centers. He is behind bars, as if he is being held in ICE detention with the child. He is standing on books discussing servant leadership and mission work, because he is serving as the ultimate missionary in this situation.

But You Said You Are Pro Life
2019, Assemblage
14" x 8" x 4"



Child Abuse/Abortion Rights

Abortion opponents fight tirelessly to protect the unborn. They put their time, money and votes toward this cause for which they support so fervently. However, life doesn't end at birth. The needs of children who are abused and neglected because they are born into a world of poverty, addiction, mental illness, sexism, racism and numerous other social ills remain overlooked. Until we address these other challenges, it is obtuse to devote so much energy into bringing children into this world only to neglect their needs as soon as they have taken their first breath.

The battered doll is a symbol of the children that are abused and neglected. The bandage over its mouth represents how these children do not have a voice, and the background is part of a Pro-Life protest sign.

Advice to Lily
2019, Assemblage
10' x 16" x 3"



Nonconformity

This piece was inspired by advice the artist gave to her daughter when she was in high school. In a text, she wrote to her, "People at your school think in terms of little boxes. They want everyone to be a cube, so they fit in the boxes. They want uniformity so everything looks equal (even if that means it's not equitable). But, people like us think in orbs - always spinning and rolling. We do things differently. The trick is to show them how our orbs can fit nicely in their boxes."

The sphere in the box, replacing the "W" block, can be spun by turning a mechanism behind the box.

2019 Exhibited at *Minimalism*, Ohio Valley Arts League, Henderson, KY

The House of Patriarchy
2019, Assemblage
8" x 12" x 2"



The Historic Oppression of Women

The phrase “a woman’s place is in the home” is one of the reminders of the patriarchal structure of society. Keeping women in “the home” keeps them in domestic servitude, keeps them uneducated, keeps them dependent upon men and prevents them from ever threatening the patriarchy. They become figurative prisoners and sexual slaves to their captor, male dominance. This piece represents those themes through literal images of captive women, tucked inside a traditional house.

Huddled Masses
2019, Assemblage
9" x 16" x 2.5"

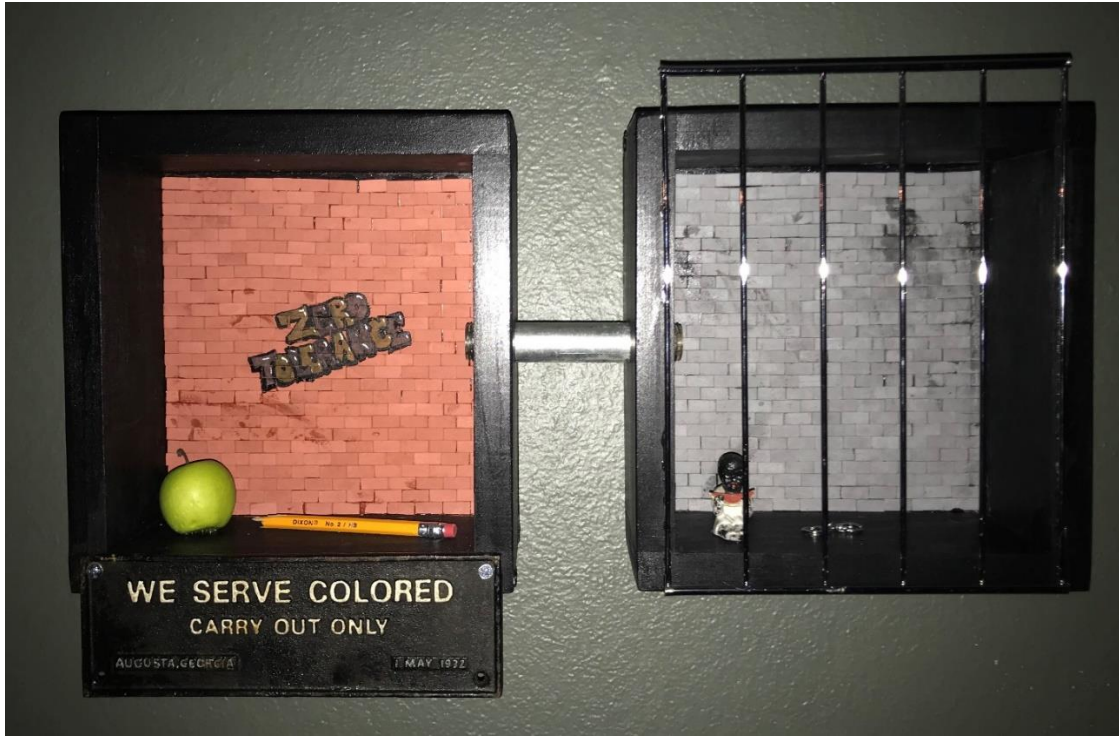


Refugees

The Refugee Act of 1980, along with the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, obliges the US to recognize valid claims for asylum. In 2017, advocates filed complaints with the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties due to the Trump administration's denial of entry to persons seeking asylum in the US.

The Statue of Liberty is long considered a welcoming beacon to persons seeking a better life in the United States, as Lazarus' poem states on its base "Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor, Your Huddled Masses Yearning to Breathe Free." On this piece, Lady Liberty is perched on top, but under the surface we see a small child, huddled in the corner of a detention camp cage. Graffiti on the wall quotes part of the poem, with the words "Not Really" underneath.

The School to Prison Pipeline
2018, Assemblage
22 "x 10" x 4"



Racism: Disproportionate Incarceration of Black Youth

Schools are charged with educating our youth; however, zero tolerance policies are removing hundreds of thousands of youth from school settings and feeding them directly into the criminal justice system. African American and Latino youth are disproportionately affected by these policies and procedures. This practice, dubbed the school-to-prison pipeline, criminalizes students of color and fosters the behavior it is intended to prevent.

This assemblage art uses two boxes connected by galvanized pipe, representing the classroom and the jail cell. The apple, a symbol of the education system, also represents the nurturance schools should provide. However, as the artifact from segregation states, persons of color are only served “to go.” Another symbol of racism, the Sambo character, is eating in the prison, having taken his food through the Pipeline.

2018 - Exhibited at “Juried Exhibition 2018” at Arts Illiana Gallery, Terre Haute, IN

They Paved Paradise
2018, Assemblage
12" x 12" x 14"



Deforestation

Joni Mitchell sang of how “they paved paradise and put up a parking lot.” She described visiting trees in the Tree Museum after nature was destroyed by progress. Deforestation clears large stands of trees in order to create space for farmland, roadways, housing additions or urban developments. This removes large sources of oxygen from the environment and contributes to climate change.

This piece repurposes part of a tree trunk that was cut down. The top is coated with tar to make the tree museum’s parking lot, and the only green that remains is the color of the vehicles.

Puppy Mill
2018, Assemblage
6" x 16" x 5"

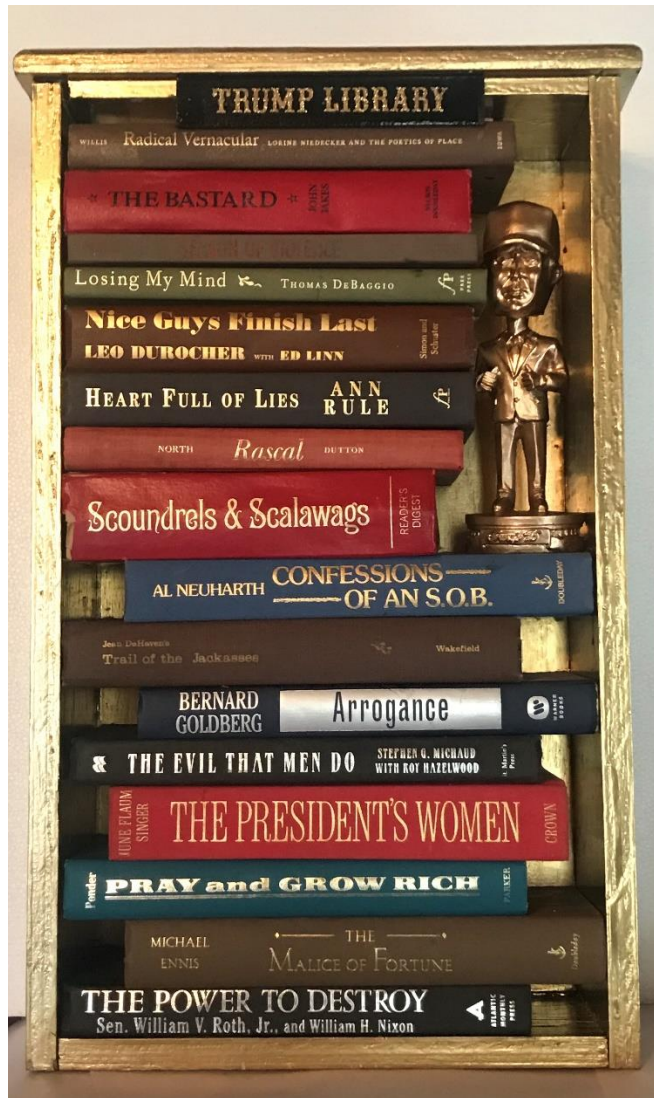


Puppy Mills

An estimated 2 million puppies are born in the US to commercial breeders that place profit over the well-being of the dogs. These puppy mills are known for the crowded, unsanitary conditions of the wire cages, which contribute to illness and injury of the dogs.

In this piece, the windmill not only symbolizes the machine-like nature of the puppy breeding industry, but also serves as the dogs' overcrowded cage. Pennies around the base remind us that it is all done to generate financial gain.

Trump Library
2018, Assemblage
15" x 30" x 6"



Presidential Criticism

The collection of book titles housed in this repurposed drawer, painted in Trump's signature gold, describe the artist's opinions of the 45th US President.

Human Commodity
2017, Assemblage
6" x 18" x 1"



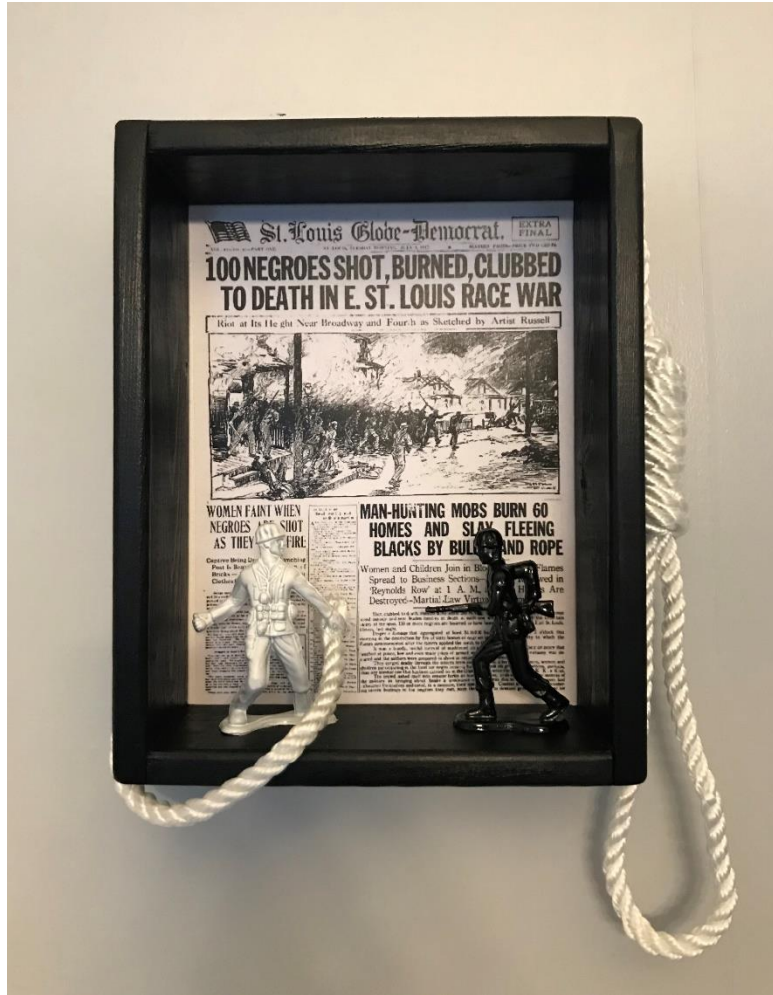
Sex Trafficking

Human trafficking is the forced labor and exploitation of a person for the explicit benefit of another person. An estimated 21 million people are currently victims, with nearly 5 million involved in the sex industry. Some research suggests that there may be up to 10 million children involved in sex work.

The artist used a photo of her daughter to represent the young women and girls forced into the sex industry by human trafficking. Her mouth is silenced by a barcode, as she is now a commodity to be sold and silenced. The hardware on the piece is a visual reminder of how they are chained and (literally and figuratively) screwed.

2019 Exhibited at "Hear Us! Female Voices by Female Artists" at Riverside Arts Center; Ypsilanti, MI

Race Wars: That's Not a Lifeline
2017, Assemblage
12" x 18" x 3"



Racism

When white workers decided to strike in East St. Louis in 1917, the Aluminum Ore Company replaced them with black workers. This exacerbated already tense race relations. Following the shooting of two police officers, thousands of white men marched into East St Louis attacking African Americans, including women and children.

This assemblage uses newspaper headlines from 1917 as the backdrop for the face-off between black and white plastic army men. The white figure holds onto a rope, representing the white men trying to hold onto their jobs and economic advantages. However, if you follow the rope to the other side, it ends in a noose. This represents the unprovoked lynchings of African Americans throughout US history.

The 79 Cent Epiphany
2016, Assemblage
9" x 20" x 3"



Gender Wage Inequality

The gender pay gap is the average difference in pay for men and women. When this piece was created, women earned 79 cents for every \$1.00 earned by a man. Many factors create this disparity, including discrimination, undervaluing of women's work, occupational segregation and the motherhood penalty.

An old divided tray houses the vintage wedding toppers, perched on stacks of pennies representing their pay difference. The lightbulb represents the epiphany of society as it is recognizing this systemic marginalization of women.

2016 Exhibited at "Putting it All Together" at the Foundry, St. Charles, MO

2017 Awarded top honor at the "Art of Recycling Show," at Preston Arts Center, Henderson, KY

2019 Exhibited at "Hear Us! Female Voices by Female Artists" at Riverside Arts Center; Ypsilanti, MI

Food Industry
2016, Assemblage
8" x 12" x 4"



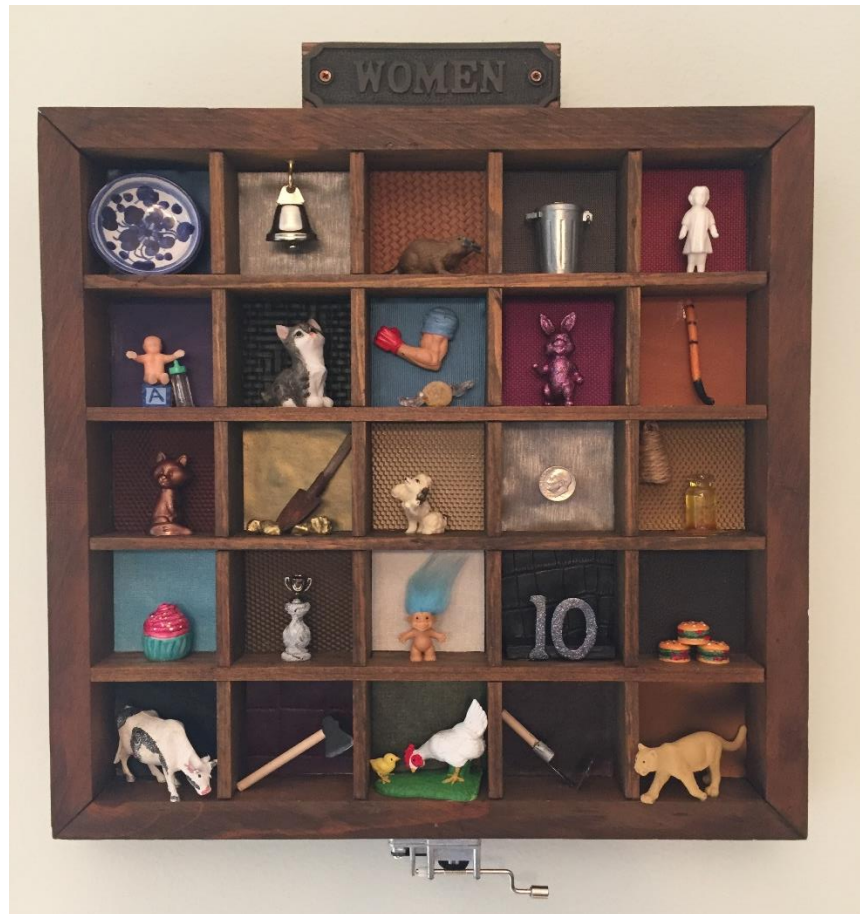
Food Justice

The food we consume today barely resembles the natural sources of nutrition our bodies need. Even what appears to be fruit is changed by added colors, flavors and chemicals. This is the modern food industry. Persons living in poverty have even fewer options for making healthy food choices due to structural inequality and food deserts in low-income neighborhoods.

The grinder represents the industrialization of food production in modern times, where we are manufacturing foods using artificial colors and flavors. In the corner, a jar of pennies reminds us that money is what drives this process.

2016 – Second Place “Food for Thought” art show; Evansville, IN

Don't Call Me Sweetheart
2016, Assemblage
16" x 18" x 2"



Objectification of Women

Chick, baby, cow, honey...these are just some of the terms used to describe or refer to women. Women are considered objects and kept in boxes that limit their identities. These stereotypical views of women affect how they perceive themselves, as well as how they are perceived in society. This can affect self-esteem, educational pursuits and economic potential.

This shadow box represents twenty-five of these objects. Mounted beneath it, a music box plays "Let Me Call You Sweetheart."

2016 – Exhibited in "Soapbox" at the Foundry, St. Charles, MO

Campfire of the Cosmos
2016, Assemblage
16" x 24" x 7"



Global Warming

Human actions, such as deforestation and pollution, are leading to gradual increases in the Earth's temperature. This has created climate change, rising sea levels, melting polar ice caps, and extreme weather phenomenon. This can impact food production and affect public health.

This piece repurposes an old drawer that holds the earth with its melting ice caps and distraught polar bear. Above it, the hand of a deity is roasting a marshmallow over the warming earth. Tiny LED lightbulbs, powered by rechargeable batteries, dot the sky of the Cosmos.

2017 Exhibited at *Art in the City*, Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana, Evansville, IN

The Real Bad Monkey
2016, Assemblage
9" x 14" x 4

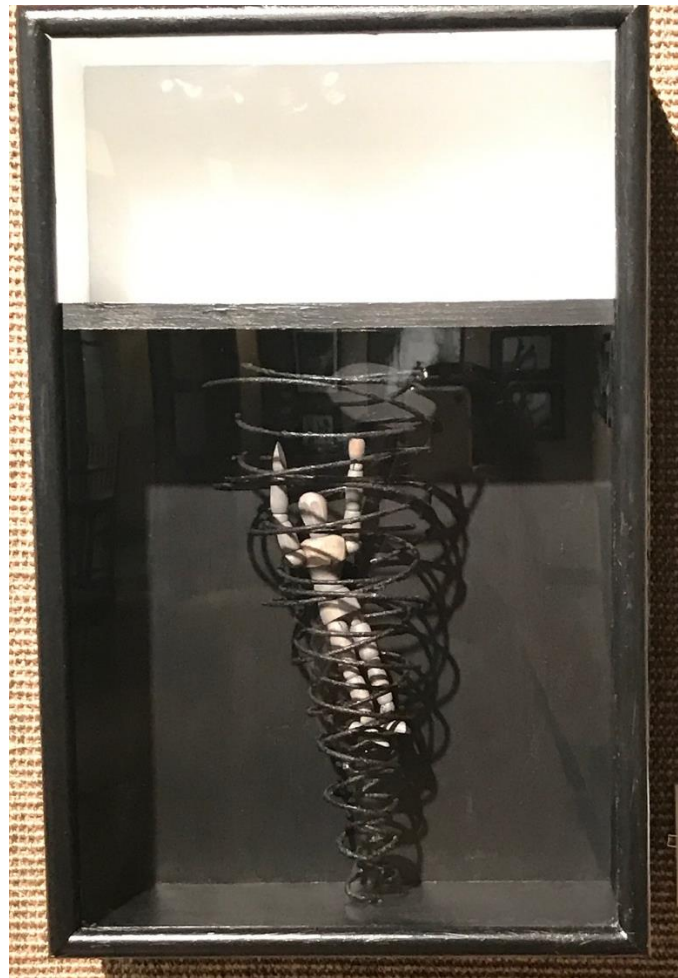


Animal Welfare

When a small child fell into Harambe's enclosure at the Cincinnati Zoo, the gorilla was shot to death. This Piece, which has a gorilla perched on the end of a gun, places the blame on all of us who participate in exploiting animals. As you press on the dime outside his cage, a red LED lights, "firing" the pistol. This raises the question of which one is the actual "bad monkey." Is it Harambe, the child or each of us?

2017 Exhibited at *Art of Recycling VII*, Ohio Valley Art League, Henderson, KY

Downward Spiral
2016, Assemblage
9" x 14" x 3"



Stigma of Mental Health

Major depression is one of the most common mental disorders in the US, affecting over 17 million adults. It can cause one to feel as if they are being sucked downward in a whirling black hole. Over one-third of those adults never receive treatment for their depression, and the stigma associated with the disorder is one of the primary reasons that people do not seek help.

The top of this box is the white area of contentedness, but there is a hole in the platform in which the person has been pulled down into the spiral. This black area is the darkness of depression.

2017 Exhibited at *Noir*, Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana, Evansville, IN

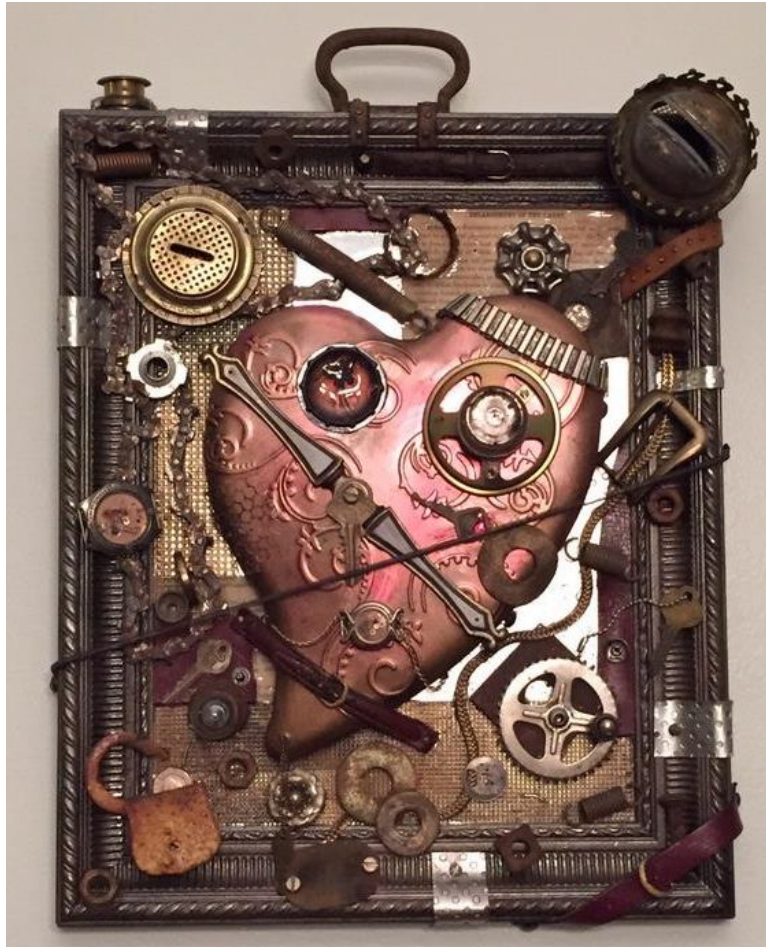
Saddest Show on Earth
2016, Assemblage
8" x 14" x 3"



More than just clowns and acrobats to entertain us, circuses are also captors and tormentors to exotic animals. Elephants receive especially cruel treatment, as harsh methods are used to control the enormous animals. They spend their lives in chains and have limited access to water while traveling, as is depicted in this artwork.

2016 Exhibited at *Soapbox*, The Foundry Art Centre, St. Charles, MO

Set My Heart Free
2015, Assemblage
14" x 20" x 2"



Capitalism

We may not always be free to follow our heart's desires and pursue the careers of our dreams because we are held down by the trappings of capitalism and materialism. Made entirely of cast-off items, this piece represents the artist's desire to break free of those bonds.

2017 Exhibited at *Another's Treasure*, Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana, Evansville, IN